AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

1. (Currently amended) A minimally invasive method of implanting a lead, comprising:

gaining access to a pericardium of a patient's chest proximate a cardiac chamber;

advancing a lead introducing system through the pericardium and epicardium, and to the myocardium of the patient's heart, the lead introducing system comprising one or more myocardium penetrating components;

penetrating the myocardium with the one or more myocardium penetrating components;

advancing a distal portion of a lead into the myocardium using the lead introducing system, the distal portion of the lead advancing into the myocardium one or both of over and within the one or more myocardium penetrating components of the lead introducing system;

implanting an electrode of the lead within the myocardium; and

removing the lead introducer system from the patient's chest.

2. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising gaining access to the epicardium using a cannula advanced from an outer chest wall of the patient.

3. (Currently amended) The method of claim 1, further comprising creating a space in the myocardium using the one or more myocardium penetrating components of the lead introduction system.

4. (Currently amended) The method of claim 3, wherein the one or more myocardium penetrating components comprise a piercing needle and wherein penetrating the

myocardium ~~advancing the lead introducing system~~ further comprises ~~advancing~~ penetrating the myocardium with the ~~a~~ piercing needle~~ into the myocardium~~.

5. (Currently amended) The method of claim 3, wherein[:] the one or more myocardium penetrating components comprises a piercing needle and a dilating sheath and wherein creating the space in the myocardium further comprises creating a space in the myocardium by advancing the dilating sheath over the piercing needle and into the myocardium
~~advancing the lead introducing system further comprises:~~
~~advancing a piercing needle into the myocardium; and~~
~~advancing a dilating sheath over the piercing needle; and~~
~~creating the myocardial space further comprises using the dilating sheath to create the space in the myocardium~~.

6. (Currently amended) The method of claim 5, further comprising removing the dilating sheath prior to advancing the lead using the lead introducing system, wherein the lead is advanced into the myocardium over the piercing needle.

7. (Currently amended) The method of claim 1, wherein advancing the distal portion of the lead into the myocardium comprises advancing the lead one or both of over and within the one or more myocardium penetrating components while the one or more penetrating components are penetrating the myocardium~~ further comprising eluting a steroid from the lead and into the myocardium~~.

8. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein implanting the electrode comprises affixing the electrode to myocardial tissue.

9. (Currently amended) The method of claim 8, wherein affixing the electrode comprises using an active fixation mechanism that affixes the electrode within and to the myocardial tissue.

10. (Original) The method of claim 9, wherein the active fixation mechanism comprises a helical mechanism.

11. (Original) The method of claim 10, wherein the helical mechanism is positioned coaxial to a longitudinal axis of the lead.

12. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein implanting the electrode comprises stabilizing the lead proximally of the electrode.

13. (Original) The method of claim 12, wherein stabilizing the lead comprises stabilizing the lead via attachment of a portion of the lead to an epicardial surface of the heart.

14. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein implanting the electrode comprises placing a fixation element epicardially at or near a location at which the lead enters the myocardium.

15. (Original) The method of claim 14, wherein the fixation element comprises a suture.

16. (Original) The method of claim 14, wherein the fixation element comprises a clip.

17. (Original) The method of claim 14, wherein the fixation element comprises a chronic fixation arrangement.

18. (Currently amended) The method of claim 1, wherein ~~entering~~ penetrating the myocardium comprises entering the myocardium with the one or more myocardium penetrating components at a shallow angle substantially tangential to an epicardial surface and penetrating the myocardium to a predetermined depth.

19. (Original) The method of claim 18, wherein the shallow angle ranges between about 5 degrees and about 45 degrees with respect to a plane tangential to the epicardial surface, and the predetermined depth ranges between about 1 mm and about 10 mm.

20. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the lead is implanted proximate a left ventricle of the heart.

21. (Currently amended) The method of claim 1, wherein:

the lead comprises proximal and distal ends and an open lumen defined therebetween;

the one or more myocardium penetrating components comprises a piercing needle;

~~advancing the lead introducing system~~ piercing the myocardium further comprises advancing ~~a~~ the piercing needle into the myocardium and into the epicardium ~~and myocardium~~; and

advancing the distal portion of the lead into the myocardium comprises passing the lead over the piercing needle such that the piercing needle is within ~~and through~~ the open lumen of the lead while the lead passes over the piercing needle.

22. (Original) The method of claim 21, further comprising engaging an active fixation mechanism that affixes the electrode within the myocardium.

23. (Currently amended) The method of claim 21, wherein the one or more myocardium penetrating components further comprise a dilating sheath and wherein advancing the lead introducing system further comprises:

advancing ~~a~~ the dilating sheath over the piercing needle, the dilating sheath creating a space within the myocardium; and

removing the dilating sheath prior to passing the lead over the piercing needle.

24. (Currently amended) The method of claim 1, wherein:

the one or more myocardium penetrating components comprise a piercing needle, a dilating sheath, and a dilating catheter;

piercing the myocardium comprises piercing the myocardium with the piercing needle;

advancing the lead introducing system further comprises[:]~~advancing a piercing needle into the epicardium and myocardium;~~ advancing ~~a~~ the dilating sheath over the piercing needle, the dilating sheath creating a space within the myocardium[;], and advancing ~~a~~ the dilating catheter over the dilating sheath~~, wherein~~; and

advancing the lead comprises removing the piercing needle and the dilating sheath from within the dilating catheter and then passing the lead through the dilating catheter while the dilating catheter is at least partially within the myocardium~~; and~~

~~removing the piercing needle and dilating sheath~~.

25. (Original) The method of claim 24, further comprising using a stylet that stiffens the lead to facilitate advancement of the lead through the dilating catheter.

26. (Original) The method of claim 24, further comprising engaging an active fixation mechanism that affixes the electrode within the myocardium.

27-66. (Canceled)

67. (Withdrawn) A minimally invasive method of implanting a lead, comprising:

gaining access to a pericardium of a patient's chest proximate a cardiac chamber;

advancing lead introducing system through the pericardium and epicardium, and to myocardium of the patient's heart, the lead introducing system comprising a piercing needle;

advancing a lead to the myocardium using the lead introducing system, the lead advancing over the piercing needle;

implanting an electrode of the lead within the myocardium; and

removing the lead introducer system from the patient's chest.

68. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 67, wherein advancing the lead introducing system further comprises advancing a dilating sheath over the piercing needle and using the dilating sheath to create space in the myocardium.

69. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 67, wherein:

the lead comprises proximal and distal ends and an open lumen defined therebetween; and

advancing the lead comprises passing the lead over the piercing needle and through the open lumen.

70. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 67, further comprising engaging an active fixation mechanism that affixes the electrode within the myocardium.

71. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 67, wherein advancing the lead introducing system further comprises:

advancing a dilating sheath over the piercing needle, the dilating sheath creating a space within the myocardium; and

removing the dilating sheath prior to passing the lead over the piercing needle.

72. (Withdrawn) A minimally invasive method of implanting a lead, comprising:

gaining access to a pericardium of a patient's chest proximate a cardiac chamber;

advancing a lead introducing system through the pericardium and epicardium, and to myocardium of the patient's heart, the lead introducing system comprising a piercing needle and a myocardium dilating catheter;

advancing a lead to the myocardium using the lead introducing system, the lead passing through the myocardium dilating catheter;

implanting an electrode of the lead within the myocardium; and

removing the lead introducer system from the patient's chest.

73. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 72, wherein advancing the lead introducing system further comprises advancing a dilating sheath over the piercing needle using the dilating sheath to create space in the myocardium.

74. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 21, wherein advancing the lead introducing system further comprises:

advancing a dilating sheath over the piercing needle, the dilating sheath creating a space within the myocardium; and

removing the dilating sheath prior to passing the lead through the myocardium dilating catheter.